

of SPEAKING *as the* ORACLES
of GOD.

No 7

A
S E R M O N,

Preached before the Reverend the

C L E R G Y
OF THE

DEANARY of *Shoreham,*

AT THE

VISITATION,

Held in the Parish Church of

F A R N I N G H A M,

On THURSDAY, *May* 19, 1743.

By JOHN ANDREWS, M. A. *K*
VICAR of that Church.

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OF THE ORACLES
OF GOD

THE
F R M O N

Printed by the Rev. J. T. ...

G L E N G Y

OF THE

OF THE ...



Held at the ...

THE ...

OF THE ...

BY JOHN ...
VICAR of the Church

LONDON, printed by J. T. ...

W. E. Duncombe in Dublin. 1744

[Price 2s. 6d.]

To the Most Reverend Father in God,

HIS

GRACE, JOHN,

By DIVINE PROVIDENCE,

LORD ARCH-BISHOP

OF

CANTERBURY,

PRIMATE of all *England*,

AND

METROPOLITAN,

And One of His

MAJESTY'S Most HONOURABLE

PRIVY COUNCIL:

THIS

DICOURSE is, with all

HUMILITY and GRATITUDE,

Dedicated by the

AUTHOR.

To the Most Honourable the Lords of the Council

His

GRACE JOHN

BY HIS GRACE

LORD ARCHBISHOP

CANTERBURY

PRIMATE OF ALL ENGLAND

AND

METROPOLITAN



MAJESTY'S MOST HONOURABLE

PRIVY COUNCIL

THAT

DISCOURSE is, with all

Humility and Gratitude,

Dedicated by the

AUTHOR.



1 PET. IV. 11.

*If any Man speak, let him speak as
the Oracles of G O D.*

ST. Peter in this Epistle comforts the believing Jews, dispersed through the several Countries of Pontus, Galatia, Capadocia, Asia, and Bitinia, making their Persecutions Matter of the greatest Joy and Consolation to them; and mixeth with his Encouragement such Precepts, as were agreeable to their then persecuted State; such as Purity of Life and Manners, directing further, that as every Man had received the Gift, whether of God's Grace or providential Dispensations, so we ought to minister the same one to another, as good Stewards of the manifold Grace of God; and then it follows, in the Words of my Text, *If any Man speak*, or be called to this eminent Office in the Church of Christ, *let him speak as the Oracles of God.*

B

In

In discoursing upon which I shall observe this very natural and easy Method.

I. I shall consider what we are to understand by *the Oracles of God*.

II. What by *speaking as the Oracles of God*.

III. I will conclude with an Application to the present Occasion.

I. I am to consider what we are to understand by *the Oracles of God*. Now, by *the Oracles of God* we are to understand the Holy Scriptures, the Books of the New as well as the Old Testament. For though it is not to be presumed the Canon of the New Testament was finished or settled at the Time St. Peter wrote this Epistle; or that Copies of the several Books could be so soon collected and dispersed, for which Reason the Apostle may well be supposed, in this Place, to have principally an Eye and Regard to the ancient *Jewish* Scriptures; yet, forasmuch as the Writings of the Apostles were dictated and directed by the same Divine Spirit, and do more directly concern us, as Christians; and forasmuch as some of the Books of the New Testament were published before the Writing of this Epistle, and, of Consequence, well known to the *Jewish* Converts, to whom it is directed, we may, and ought, by *the Oracles of God*, understand the Books of the New, as well as the Old Testament, the whole Canon of Scripture, called the

the *Oracles of God* ; because they were either delivered by the Mouth of God himself, or by his Prophets, who received their Instructions and Commissions from him, or by his Son *Jesus Christ* and his Apostles ; who have perfected that Revelation of his Will, which God was pleased to begin soon after the Fall, and continued to enlarge at several Periods of Time, as would best suit the Ends of his Providence. No Prophecy, saith this very Apostle, of the *Scripture is of any private Interpretation*, or rather, of any one's own private Conception, for the Prophecy came not of old Time by the Will of Man, but holy Men of God, spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, 2 Pet. i. 20, 21. To which agree the Words of St. Paul, *All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God, and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness*, 2 Tim. iii. 16. It is very evident, that by the *Scriptures*, in these several Places, must be meant the Books of the Old Testament ; but, by Analogy of Reason, they may, and ought to be applied to those of the New ; they being all of them wrote by the Guidance and Direction of the same Spirit of God, with this Advantage to the latter, that what was shadowed out by *Moses* in the Law, and obscurely intimated by the Prophets, is more fully declared by the Gospel, viz. The Mystery of Man's Redemption.

I might here take Occasion to observe, how the Doctrines of *Moses* and the Prophets, of Christ and his Apostles mutually support and illustrate each other ; but I only take Notice, that the Scriptures of the New Testament are to us Christians as much the Oracles of God, as the Writings of *Moses* and the Prophets were to the *Jews*. It is the same God, who at sundry Times, and divers Manners, spake in Time past unto the Fathers by the Prophets, who hath in these last Days spoken unto us by his Son, Heb. i. 1. And therefore the same, if not greater Regard, is to be paid to the Doctrines of Christ and his Apostles, than was given to those, delivered by *Moses* and the Prophets. For, if Attention and Regard were given to them, because they spake in the Name of God, or by a special Commission from Him, how much greater Regard and Attention must be due to that Revelation of his Will, which God has given us by his own Son ? who was the only Prophet, that ever came into the World, that perfectly understood the Will of his Father. St. Paul therefore exhorting the *Thessalonians*, and in them us, to live up to those Rules of Holy Living, which were pleasing to God, and to improve more and more in the Duties of Piety and Virtue, as he had commanded them by the Direction and Authority of the Lord Jesus, gives them to understand, if they refused Obedience, their Contempt was not so much offered to him as

to God himself. *We beseech you, Brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us, how you ought to walk and to please God, so you would abound more and more; for ye know what Commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the Will of God even your Sanctification.-----He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not Man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit, 1 Thes. iv. 1, 2, 3; 8.*

But when I say, by *the Oracles of God*, we are to understand the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, I would not be thought to exclude the Dictates of Reason and Conscience; which are, though in a lower Sense, to be esteemed the Precepts of God. For whether we suppose those Impressions of Good and Evil, which every Man experiences within himself, and which the most profligate cannot wholly stifle the Sense of, to proceed from an innate Principle of Virtue, or to be the Result only of Reason and Reflection, it is all one as to our present Purpose, both the one and the other being to us the Gift of God. Hence it is that Solomon calls the *Spirit of a Man the Candle of the Lord*, Prov. xx. 27. And St. Paul, these natural Notices the Revelation of God. *The Wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men.---Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has shewed it unto them;*

them; for the invisible Things of him from the Creation of the World are clearly seen, being understood by the Things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead, Rom. i. 18, 19. The Substance of the Apostle's Argument is, that Men might all along, from the Foundation of the World, by a right Use of their natural Powers in considering the Frame and Order of the Universe, have discovered the Principles of natural Religion, the Existence of a God, and the Duties of Piety and Virtue. For God never gave them up to an invincible Blindness or Ignorance, but manifested himself to them in his Works of Creation and Providence. This I observe, because when God gave us the Light of Revelation, he never intended to deprive us of this natural Light, but to trim, and to improve it, and to make it shine the brighter.

Revelation makes known to us many Things, which either could not have been discovered at all, or but very imperfectly by the mere Light of natural Reason; but being revealed, are perfectly agreeable to it. There is nothing in the whole Christian System repugnant to the Laws of natural Reason and Religion; there is a perfect Harmony and Agreement between them, as might easily be shewn by an Induction of Particulars, were this a proper Place for it. How much corrupted therefore, and degenerated soever we may suppose human Nature to be in its fallen State,

State, those Mysticks, who would at this Time represent either Doctrines or Practices inconsistent with the Principles of Reason, as the necessary Conditions of the Gospel Covenant, will, in the End, be found to do as little Service to the Cause of Revealed Religion, as their Brethren the Cynicks of old did to that of Natural Religion. Christianity is a reasonable Institution, and Men must be persuaded to embrace and practice it upon reasonable Principles.

Thus much being said to shew, that by *the Oracles of God*, we are to understand the sacred Scriptures, together with the Dictates of Reason and Conscience in Subordination to them. I come now,

Illy, To consider, what we are to understand by *speaking as the Oracles of God*. In these Words is comprised the whole Duty of the Christian Orator; what he is to speak, or the subject Matter of his Discourse; this must be *the Oracles of God*; and how he is to address himself to his Hearers, and with what Authority, viz. *as the Oracles of God*, i. e. with the same persuasive Eloquence and the same Authority.

If the Christian Orator would discharge his Duty with any Reputation to himself or Advantage to his Hearers. If he would be attended to with Pleasure, or prevail upon those that hear him to receive his Doctrines, *Not as the Word*

Word of Men, but as the Word of God; he must be careful,

1. In the first Place, that the subject Matter of his Discourse be *the Oracles of God*; some important Article of Religion or Morality, that is either expressly taught, or may, by necessary consequence, be deduced from the Holy Scriptures; or is founded on the eternal and immutable Laws of right Reason. Should any Man pretend to advance any other Doctrines, or teach otherwise, whatever his personal Virtues, or other Qualifications may be to recommend him, he ought to be shunned and avoided as a Seducer of the People. *Tho' we, or an Angel from Heaven (were that possible) preach any other Gospel unto you (saith St. Paul) let him be accursed, Gal. i. 8.* He repeats the Imprecation, to shew his Abhorrence of the Crime, *If any Man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed, v. 9.* It is a Case, in which every Man may be his own Casuist, it requiring no very great Skill or Learning to determine the Equity of *obeying God rather than Man.*

God has an antecedent Right to our Obedience, which no subsequent Power can cancel or destroy. He is the supreme Law-giver and Governour of the Universe; and he has given us a Law; which it is not in the Power of any Man or Body of Men to evacuate. They cannot give us new Terms of Salvation, or make new Articles of Faith, or alter, or

dis-

dispense with those already made. Here we are absolutely bound up, and cannot go beyond the Word of our Great Lord and Master, to say either less or more. The utmost the christian Orator can do in this Case, is to explain, and to illustrate, what the Will of God is in the Sense of Scripture, where the Passages are dark and obscure, and may be wrested to wrong Purposes. And thus far our Lord himself declares his own Doctrine to have been limited. *I have not spoken of myself, says he, but the Father which sent me, he gave me Commandment what I should say, and what I should speak, and I know that his Commandment is Life everlasting, whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me so I speak, Jo. xii. 49, 50.* Ought not we therefore to * take good Heed to ourselves, and to our Doctrines; to be very careful what we deliver as necessary Articles of Faith and Manners, and to form all our Discourses to the People by that Model of Doctrine, which has been delivered to us by our Saviour and his Apostles.

Our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount is a brief, but clear, and comprehensive Exposition of the moral Law. At other Times, he explained to his Hearers the ancient Prophets, *beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the Things concerning himself, Luke xxiv. 27.* The same Method was pursued by his Apostles:

* 1 Tim. iv. 16,

Sometimes they discoursed of our Saviour's Humiliation and Sufferings; at other Times of his Exaltation, and Session at the Right-hand of God, and his mediatorial Office; and again, at other Times they treated of the Duties of moral Virtue and civil Life, enforcing what they taught with the Consideration of a Judgment to come, and the Rewards and Punishments consequent thereupon. St. Paul backed his Reasoning before * *Fælix* of *Righteousness and Temperance*, with this Consideration, which so sensibly affected the *Roman Governor*, that it made him tremble. In his Epistles, he says, † *He delivered that which he also received, how that Christ died for our Sins, and rose again according to the Scriptures: And is entered into Heaven itself, now to appear in the Presence of God for us.* And his Directions to *Timothy* concerning the pastoral Office are chiefly of the Duties of civil Life, saying, *These Things teach and exhort; and if any Man consent not unto wholesome Words, even the Words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Doctrine, which is according to Godliness,----- from such withdraw thyself,* 1 Tim. vi. 2, 3, 5.

Now, I presume, when the same Doctrines are taught in our Churches, when we open to our Congregations the Scriptures, and prove from *Moses* and all the Prophets, *That Jesus is the Christ*; when, in pursuance of our Saviour's own Method, and after the Example of

* Acts xxiv. 25. † 1 Cor. ⁹xv. 3, 4.---Heb. ix. 24.

his Apostles, we endeavour to persuade and to convince those, committed to our Charge, of the Necessity of *living * soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present World, looking for the blessed Hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* When these Doctrines, I say, are taught and enforced in our Churches, I presume, Christ, and his Doctrine, is truly preached among us, though we may not fall in with the particular Humours and Fancies of every Empirick in Theology.

The fundamental Truths of Christianity, and the common Precepts of Morality, are Doctrines always necessary, always seasonable ; and are, at this Time, made more so, by the secret Endeavours of some to pervert the Faith, and the more open Profaneness and scandalous Licentiousness of others, who call themselves Christians. Whilst these Things are known to be in us, and to abound, these principal Duties of Religion ought never to give Place to † *Questions and Strifes of Words*; such as be those of Justification and Regeneration, which *profit not, save only § to the Subversion of the Hearers.*

It is true, the Doctrine of Justification, if rightly stated and understood, is to be admitted as a most profitable Doctrine, but as most commonly managed, is destructive to true Re-

* Tit. ii. 12, 13. † 1 Tmi. vi. 4. § 2 Tim. ii. 14. ‡ *Herm.* of Salvat. pt. iii.

ligion. For, though it be true in the general Proposition, that we are justified by Faith, or by Faith alone, yet it may be false in the particular Explication. Faith is a Term of great Latitude; sometimes it is put for the Act of believing, and in that Sense is inferior to many other Christian Graces and Virtues; and sometimes 'tis put for the Whole of our Christian Duty; not barely for the Act of believing, but as also implying that Obedience, which is the genuine Fruit of our Faith: And, in this Sense, it may be said, though improperly, to justify. Truly, and properly speaking, we are justified in the Sight of God, *only* by the Merits and Death of Christ, as the formal Cause; and our Faith and Obedience are the Conditions, upon which that Act of Grace and Mercy is conveyed, and made over to us.

This is evidently the true Notion of Faith in the Work of Justification, in the Sense of our Church, which teacheth us in her Homilies, † “ That the right and true Faith is not
 “ only to believe that holy Scripture, and all
 “ the aforesaid Articles of our Faith are true,
 “ but also to have a sure Trust and Confidence
 “ in God’s merciful Promises, to be saved
 “ from everlasting Damnation by Christ,
 “ *whereof doth follow a loving Heart to obey*
 “ *his Commandments.*” And then it follows, soon after, “ How can a Man have this sure
 “ Trust and Confidence in God, that by the

* Hom. 1. of Faith, pt. i. † Homil. of Salvat. pt. iii.

“ Merits

“ Merits of Christ his Sins are forgiven, and
 “ he reconciled to the Favour of God, and to
 “ be Partaker of the Kingdom of Heaven by
 “ Christ, when he liveth ungodly, and denieth
 “ Christ in his Deeds.” Instead of which,
 we have been taught to describe the true Chri-
 stian Faith to be only “ a sure Trust and
 “ Confidence in God’s merciful Promises to
 “ be saved from everlasting Damnation by
 “ Christ ;” or “ a sure Trust and Confidence,
 “ that our Sins are forgiven, and we reconcil-
 “ ed to the Favour of God.” Is this dealing
 ingenuously or fairly by the Homilies? By the
 same Means, not only the Homilies, but the
 Holy Scriptures, may be brought to assert any
 Thing, and, of consequence, to prove nothing.
 This is to pervert the Rule of Faith, and to
 make it patronise the most dangerous and de-
 structive Errors.

The Doctrine of Regeneration, if rightly
 explained and understood, is also a true Scrip-
 ture Doctrine, nevertheless may be false in the
 Explication, and destructive of Religion. † *Ex-*
cept a Man, says our Saviour to Nicodemus, be
born again he cannot enter into the Kingdom of
God, which he explains by being born again of
Water and of the Spirit ; i. e. by being bap-
tised. Here is set forth the Necessity and the
 Benefit of Baptism : Every one, that is rightly
 and duly baptised, doth not only receive the

* Mr. Piers’s Visitation Sermon, preached at Seven-Oaks, May
 21, 1742. † John iii 3, 4.

outward Ordinance, but the inward and spiritual Grace annexed to it; though he may not perceive any sensible Operation of the Spirit of God upon him. I deny not, but at some Times, and upon some Occasions, the Operation of God's Holy Spirit has been such upon the Minds of some Men, that they could not but perceive they were secretly and strongly importuned by a Divine Impulse. But these extraordinary Impressions of the Divine Spirit are no where set forth as the ordinary Privileges of every Christian, or as necessarily attending the new Birth, and inseparable from it. The only scriptural Account of the new Birth is, that at our Baptism we have divine Principles of Virtue super-added to our natural Powers, which we ought to cultivate and improve to the utmost Degree of Perfection, which our Natures are capable of throughout the whole Course of our Lives; and he, who does sincerely endeavour to do this, is regenerate or born again; tho' he perceive not the Holy Ghost working in him after any sensible or extraordinary Manner.

This Doctrine of the Holy Ghost, sensibly working in the regenerate, is manifestly calculated to serve the crafty Ends of its Abettors to the great Prejudice of Christianity. When once Men of lively and cheerful Dispositions come to be tinged with this Leven, they fancy themselves to have an indefeasible Title to the Kingdom of Heaven, tho' they allow them-

themselves in the vilest Abominations, and the worst of Sins. On the other Hand, Men of low Spirits and melancholy Dispositions, when possessed of the same Principles, notwithstanding all their Endeavours after a Life of Piety and strict Virtue, are apt to be thrown into Despair, to look upon themselves as destitute of the Grace of God, because they experience not any sensible Operation of the Spirit of God upon their Minds.

I proceed now to another Qualification, necessary in every Preacher of the Word of God; imply'd in these Words; And that is,

2dly, Eloquence. It is an Observation of an ancient Orator to be well weighed and considered by every Christian Preacher, “ * That “ an Orator ought so to speak, as not only to “ teach and instruct, but also to delight and “ move.” And the Apostle’s Direction to the Christian Orator, is, in the Words of the Text; *If any Man speak, let him speak as the Oracles of God*, or after the Model of their true and persuasive Eloquence. It ought to be the Preacher’s utmost Care and Endeavour, by plain and solid Reasoning, to convince the Understanding, and by Sweetness and Dexterity of Address, to subdue the Affections of his Hearers, so leading *them captive to the Obedience of Faith*. Not that I think it necessary for every Preacher to come

* Aug. de Doctrin. Christ. Lib. 4. Cap. 12. ---- *Dixit ergo quidam Eloquentes, & verum dixit, ita dicere debere Eloquentem, ut doceat, ut delectet, ut floreat.*

up to the Perfection of the ancient Orators; lower Degrees of Eloquence will serve, provided a decent Regard be had to the common Rules of Oratory, viz. " To speak nothing cold or languid, nothing blunt, nothing indecent or unbecoming." But there is a grave and manly Eloquence, which no one can fail of, who diligently studies the Holy Scriptures. For there the Subject is not only great and sublime, but the Diction also is awful, solemn, beautiful, agreeable to the Dignity of the inspired Authors, becoming both themselves and their Subject. Thus the Doctrine of Christ's Session at the Right-hand of God is delivered in all its majestick Circumstances, and happy Consequences, in a Language, far exalted above all the Flights of human Eloquence. 1 Pet. iii. 22. *Who is gone into Heaven, and is set at the Right-hand of God, Angels, and Authorities, and Powers being made subject unto him.* The same Doctrine is delivered with still greater Beauty and Advantage. Heb. i. 3. *Who being the Brightness of his Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person, upholding all Things by the Word of his Power, after he had by himself purged our Sins, sat down on the Right-hand of the Majesty on high: Or, as it is in Chap. viii. ver. 1. On the Right-hand of the Throne of the Majesty in the Heavens; where he even liveth to make Intercession for us. Chap. vii. ver. 25. being also willing and able to save to the uttermost, all that come unto the Father in his Name,*

Name, or through him. *Having therefore, my beloved, these Promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit, perfecting Holiness in the Fear of God, 2 Cor. vii. 1.*

To these Instances many more might be added, to shew that they, who are conversant in the Study of the sacred Writings, and are well versed in the Phrase and Sense of the Scriptures, and know how to make a proper Use and Application of them, can never want true Eloquence to recommend their Discourses to their Hearers. But why need I multiply Authorities before you, my Brethren? Nevertheless St. Paul's Defence of himself before King *Agrippa*, *Acts xxvi.* is such a Masterpiece of Eloquence, as is not to be equalled in all the Orators of Greece or Rome, and therefore ought not to be passed by unregarded. How complaisant, how polite is his Address to the King? I think myself happy, King *Agrippa*, &c. v. 2. When giving an Account of his Principles and Conduct, *Festus* cried out, *Paul, thou art beside thyself, much Learning doth make thee mad*, v. 24. How modest, how discreet, how graceful is his Answer? *I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the Words of Truth and Soberness, or of Soundness of Mind.* Which, having thus said, with what Dexterity does he resume his Subject, and with what engaging Eloquence does he appeal to the King? *For the King knoweth of these Things. — King Agrippa, believest thou the Prophets? I know that thou believest,*

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lievest, v. 26, 27. When the King, charmed with his Eloquence, and Address, and convinced by his Arguments, said unto *Paul*, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*; how genteely does he put a Period to his Discourse? *I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this Day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these Bonds*, v. 29. It is a grand Passage of good Sense and Eloquence, such as must leave upon the Minds of his Hearers strong Impressions of his Innocence, at least the most tender Sentiments in his Favour.

In short, would we study the true Oratory of the Pulpit, we have, in the sacred Pages, sufficient Matter, both for our Instruction and for our Example; but it is Time that I hasten to shew,

3dly, That Authority, as well as Abilities, is necessary in a Preacher. It is not sufficient, that we preach the true Scripture Doctrines *only* with Plainness and Perspicuity, and with sufficient Eloquence, but Authority must be added, to enforce what we say upon the Minds and Consciences of our Hearers. Without this, the purest Doctrines, joined with the most persuasive Eloquence, are only private Admonitions; and have not that Force and Efficacy, as when delivered by those, whom God has ordained, and set apart to this Office. *Faith*, saith the Apostle, *cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*. Rom. x. 17. There must be some to teach, as well as others to hear.

If

If all were Teachers, where would be the Hearers? and were all Hearers, where would be the Teachers? Thus the Apostle put the Question, *Are all Apostles, are all Prophets, are all Teachers?* 1 Cor. xii. 29. No, God has set these in their several Orders and Stations. These are Offices, which all Persons have not Abilities to discharge, and which no Man, let his Abilities be what they will, ought to usurp or take upon himself, before he be lawfully called and sent,

The Office of a Preacher is great; and therefore not to be usurped by every Pretender; is holy, and therefore not to be exercised by any, but those, who are ordained and set apart to it. Accordingly, we may observe our Saviour, though the Son of God, did not enter upon any Part of his prophetic Office, before he was solemnly inaugurated thereto by the Hands of *John the Baptist*; when God, in an awful Manner, declared, *This is my beloved Son, bear ye him*, Matt. xvii. 5. thereby giving him full Power and Authority to make and publish his Will to Mankind, and to appoint and set apart others to the same Office. This appears further from his Commission to the Apostles; *As my Father hath sent me, so send I you*, John xx. 21. *And, lo! I am with you always even unto the End of the World*, Matt. xxviii. 20. The Apostles have been dead many Ages; our Saviour therefore could not be with them unto the End of the World; but the Promise be-

ing made to them, and to their Successors, or to that Order of Men, which they should appoint to this Office, he is, and will be with them, blessing and giving Success to their Labours always even to the last Period of Time.

In what Hands this Power of ordaining others to the ministerial Office is vested, is a Subject foreign to my present Purpose. I only observe, it was lodged originally by our Saviour in his Apostles. Whether they continued it to the Bishop *only*, or to the Bishop and his Presbyters jointly, or whether the Office of Bishop and Presbyter be not one and the same in their original Institution, I shall not discuss; but this, I say, the Apostles, by Virtue of their Commission, having a Power given them, exclusive of all others, of ordaining Ministers in the Church of Christ, no one Man, or Order of Men, can have any Power of ordaining, but what is derived from Apostolical Authority, without which, no Man ought to intermeddle in Things sacred. This has been the Doctrine of the Church in all Ages; and the Reasons, upon which it is established, are too weighty to be neglected.

For though God be obliged to make good his own Covenant, and to bless his own Institutions, yet, if *Men heap up to themselves Teachers having itching Ears*, and others boldly and presumptuously thrust themselves into the ministerial Office in Opposition to the Authority, which he has appointed, he is by no Means obliged to

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confirm their illegal Ministrations. In this Case he may very well remonstrate with them in the Words of the Prophet, *Who has required this at your Hands?* Isai. i. 12. Such Men contract great Guilt by their Presumption, and their Adherents are Partakers with them. *To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the Fat of Rams*, saith the Prophet, 1 Sam. xv. 22. It is better to be content to be an humble Hearer in the House of God, than to preach or exercise any ministerial Act without Authority.

Were this Office left indistinctly to the People, to every one, who had Confidence and Assurance to set up for a Teacher, of others, nothing but Disorder and Confusion would follow in the Church of Christ. There might then be as many Teachers, as Persons, in a Congregation; for no one having more a Right to speak than another, every one might claim an equal Share in the publick Ministrations. But sure such a State as this can never be the Ordinance of that God, who is not * *a God of Confusion, but of Peace and Order in all the Churches of the Saints.*

St. Paul, Chap. iv. represents a standing Ministry as a divine Institution and Gift of God to his Church upon the Descent of the Holy Ghost; *He gave some Apostles, some Prophets, some Evangelists and Teachers.* And

* 1 Cor. xiv. 33.

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the common Edification of Believers requires the Continuation of it through all Ages, as the same Apostle intimates in the following Verses ; *For the perfecting of the Saints, for the Work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ, till we all come in the Unity of the Faith, and of the Knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect Man, unto the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ,* v. 11, 12, 13. Now if a standing Ministry be the Gift of God to his Church, of how profane and sacrilegious an Act must they be guilty, who would take the Distribution of it out of their Hands, or, which is all one, out of those Hands, in which he has placed it, and either rashly take it upon themselves, or put it into the Hands of others, to whom he has not given it.

The Guilt, contracted by such sacrilegious Attempts, we may collect from the Punishments threatened and executed upon Offenders in this Kind under the Law, as upon *Corah* and his Company. It is true, some Allowances must be made for the Severity of that Dispensation ; and God may have special Reasons, though to us unknown, why he does not execute Judgment speedily upon such Delinquents ; nevertheless the Day is coming, wherein every one must give a just Account of his Actions ; when the present Impunity of such Sinners will serve only

ly to * *treasure up to themselves Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God.*

Lastly, Let us now, by Way of Application on the present Occasion, draw an useful Inference or two from the whole. And 1st; In the *first* Place, let us, my Reverend Brethren, make the Holy Scriptures our chief Study and Delight; that, as they contain the whole of our Christian Duty, so we may be thoroughly informed in that Duty, may be able to set it in a clear Light to others, and defend it against all Opposers. The Apostle's Advice is, to be † *ready to give an Answer to every one, that should ask a Reason of the Hope, that is in him.* The Exhortation is general, but does especially oblige Christian Preachers in particular. He can be but a very sorry Advocate for his Religion, that can produce no rational Argument in Defence of it; and as sorry a Preacher, who is ignorant in its first Rudiments. With what Face can he set up for a Teacher of the Word of God, who does himself stand in Need of one to teach him; *what* is the Hope of the calling in God, and *what* the Riches of his Grace in Christ Jesus? An ignorant and unskilful Advocate does more Disservice to the Cause of Religion, than the open Attacks, or

* Rom. ii. 5.

† 1 Pet. iii. 15.

the secret Artifices of its Enemies. It is not the Business of an Adversary to consider the just Merits of a Cause, but what is said in Defence of it. When, therefore, Arguments are brought to confirm any important Point of Doctrine, that are either inconclusive, or if conclusive, are not set in their proper Light, or have not their just Force given them, both the Pleader and his Cause, become the just Object of Contempt and Ridicule.

Our Saviour calls his Apostles the * *Light of the World*, which is, or ought to be true; of all Christian Preachers, with Respect to their Superior Knowledge and Virtue, and the Nature of their pastoral Office, which is to guide and direct others in the Way of Truth and Righteousness, which is the Way, that *leadeth unto everlasting Life*. If the *Light then that is in us be Darkness, how great is that Darkness?* We shall then be but *blind Guides*; † *blind Leaders of the blind*; and if § *the blind lead the blind*, how should they but *both fall into the Ditch*? So necessary is it for every Christian Preacher to be thoroughly instructed in the Knowledge of God, and of his Laws, that he might be able to instruct the ignorant, confirm the weak, and bring such as be in Error into the Way of Truth and of Righteousness;

* *Matt. v. 14.*

† *Matt. vi. 26.*

§ *Matt. xv.*

14. 24.

that

that so, both Preachers, and Hearers, may be saved in the Day of the Lord.

Lastly, My Advice to all is, That as *there are many false Prophets gone out into the World*, let us, as the Apostle dictates, try the *Spirits*, whether they be of God; whether what they deliver, as the *Oracles of God*, be agreeable to the Principles of Reason, and the Doctrines of the divinely-inspired Writers. If they speak not according to them, it is, because there is no Truth in them. If what they advance be contrary to any known Principles of natural Reason or Religion, that is a Reason sufficient why it ought to be rejected; if contrary to any Principles of Divine Revelation, it must be false, because contrary to the Word of God; every Article of which must be true, because God is true; and of consequence of equal Obligation. When therefore, further, any Doctrines are advanced, or Duties recommended, in Opposition to, or in Neglect of others, such Doctrines and Duties are inconsistent with Christianity, and destructive of it. By having frequent Recourse to these Rules, we shall easily distinguish the true Christian Doctrines from the false and supposititious.

Our Saviour exhorts the *Jews* to † *examine the Scriptures*, as the Means of discovering the Truth of his Doctrine; and St. *Luke* commends the *Bereans*, because they § *sought the*

* Jo. iv. 1. † Jo. v. 39. § Acts xvii. 11.

Scriptures daily, to see whether those Things, that were taught them, were so, or not. Let us go, and do likewise. Let us examine what we hear; comparing *spiritual Things with spiritual*; comparing and trying the Doctrines of particular Teachers, especially such of them, as pretend to greater Sanctity of Manners, and more refined Purity of Devotion, and distinguish themselves by some peculiar Titles of Grace and Favour, which they are fond to affect. Let every Man's Doctrine, I say, especially such a Person's, be carefully examined and compared with the sincere Word of God; so shall we not only hear, but well digest what we hear; and in doing this, we shall throw off all, that is adventitious or unsound Matter, and retain only that, which will yield true Nourishment to our Souls through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

F I N I S



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